Book reviews

Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society. *Nadia Abu El-Haj.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. vii + 352 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.

Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I. *Donald Malcolm Reid.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. ix + 409 pp., illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index.

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How do humans use visual aspects of the (archaeological) past to support theories of history and value? Although this is the underlying question historian Donald Malcolm Reid and anthropologist Nadia Abu El-Haj each considers, their resultant texts are strikingly dissimilar in ways that transcend the disciplinary divide. Writing on the roles of science in constructing arguments for grounded histories within a region marked by long-standing territorial conflicts, each author seems to answer questions raised by the other.

Abu El-Haj claims to trace the "articulation of the colonial *and* national projects" (p. 4) within archaeology's role in the Jewish settlement and historical reconstruction of Palestine. Focusing on what she refers to as the observable qualities of excavated objects, Abu El-Haj attempts throughout her book to demonstrate how "(social) science generates facts or phenomena, which refigure what counts as true or real" (p. 11). In contrast, Reid methodically plots the interactions of social, political, and personal histories that resulted in the creation of a modern Egypt. Despite its title, Reid's book is *not* focused on pharaohs as the defining element in Egyptian colonial and postcolonial history. Reid compiles data on the roles of local and international participants in Egypt's *multiple* histories—Greco-Roman, Coptic, and Islamic as well as pharaonic—and one of his primary goals is to highlight how those histories have been integrated into the concept of the modern nation.

One extremely valuable feature of Reid's book is an excellent set of illustrations, ranging from political cartoons to frontispieces of older texts, photographs to Orientalist art. Reid also provides useful appendices summarizing data referred to in the text (e.g., nationalities of travel-book writers, conference participants, and tourists). Reid uses these bodies of data, and the text supporting them, to provide a novel account of how colonial governments, imperialist European governments, archaeologists and collectors, tourists, looters, and others together produce ideas, monuments, and documents that contribute to popular understandings of Egypt and Egyptian history.

Although both Abu El-Haj and Reid discuss colonialist agendas, the two authors treat the subject quite differently. In chapter 2 of her book, Abu El-Haj considers the connections between cartography and British and European colonialism. Beyond this cursory examination of colonial interests, she never analyzes the influence European (and, later, U.S.) imperialist agendas might have had on the production of a history of Israel/Palestine. She does not consider, for example, Britain's reliance on Palestinian excavations as a way of defining *Britain* and its colonial strength (that is, meeting Britain's need to uncover the historical foundations of its own modernity to compete *scientifically* with the French, who were at that point firmly in charge of Egyptology). Reid's account is much more engrossing, as he considers at great length the various interests of French, German, British, and Ottoman politicians, landed officials, and archaeologists in the struggles for control of the scientific production of Egypt's past. Reid clarifies various colonial-imperialist agendas in Egypt using anecdotes, citations, historical data, and (to a lesser degree) analyses of this information. He emphasizes the roles of individual Egyptians in shaping archaeology and the presentation of the past through museums, talks, and expositions, and he delineates individual Europeans' roles in opening (or closing) the door for those Egyptians.

Of the two books, Abu El-Haj's provides a clearer, if occasionally repetitive, narrative. Her text is also accessible to a wider audience, both because of the broader themes with which she engages—the political nature of science, how science can "operate as a metaphor for specific national and political values and commitments" (p. 274), how territorial conflicts such as those in Israel/Palestine can through science be grounded in observable fact—and because she is much more careful to define unfamiliar terms.

Reid provides a more even-handed account of the production of Egypt as a nation, in part because he considers more actors and provides a broader context for their actions. This said, part 1 of Reid's book suffers from too much information and overwhelming organizational problems; nonspecialists will find it difficult to struggle through much of the first half of the book. A glossary seems necessary yet is not provided. Part 2 of Reid's work is much clearer. He organizes each chapter around a specific aspect of the Egyptian past (Greco-Roman, Egyptian, Islamic, Coptic) and the individual characters involved in the historical production of that past for Egyptian and international publics. By presenting the histories, influences, and goals of different actors, and their interactions and conflicts with one another, Reid creates a broad picture of how the idea of Egypt was constructed, something Abu El-Haj fails to do for Israel/Palestine, given her near-exclusive focus on changing Israeli political agendas. Reid also presents personal and political motivations and interests far more straightforwardly than does Abu El-Haj.

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In most of her book, Abu El-Haj provides clear examples of how specific instances of archaeological production—survey and excavation projects, museum organization, tour presentations—produce history, justify social practice, and underwrite political decisions and frameworks. For example, in chapter 4, Abu El-Haj contends that, in (re)mapping and (re)naming objects and places within the Palestinian landscape, the Israeli government not only linked those objects and places to popular ideas of biblical history, but also reaffirmed what constituted history. In chapter 5, Abu El-Haj delineates some of the problems inherent in equating artifacts with ethnic groups—pots with peoples—and shows how such an approach renders invisible broader implications (i.e., that attention focuses only on certain aspects and moments of the archaeological past—in this case, those that strengthen arguments for the historicity of the Israeli state). In chapter 6, she shows that such processes of equation lead to circularities within historical arguments (p. 146): Interpretations of archaeological finds are based on "prior . . . narratives . . . [that] presupposed a paradigm of and for history itself" (p. 136). She concedes that individual archaeologists may not be aware of their own biases, replicating existing circularities rather than acting to produce them (p. 161). In chapter 7, she demonstrates how "overlapping fields of practice—legal, military, political, and scholarly (archaeology, architecture, urban planning, museum design)—fabricated both history and historicity" (p. 199), or what is understood to *be* history and to hold value as history. All of these interwoven arguments are well laid out and well documented.

Although Abu El-Haj considers a broad range of perspectives on topics such as the political agendas behind efforts to preserve historical monuments and to spark interest in a national archaeological past, in far too much of the book she relates opposing *official* positions, offering only brief comments, taken from other publications, on the attitudes of the various publics within the Palestine/Israeli territory. In chapters 8 and 9, Abu El Haj includes more direct ethnographic data to support her arguments, but again, these are from outside the contexts of archaeological production. For example, Abu El-Haj speaks not with archaeologists who are excavating, but with archaeologists on tours given in conjunction with international archaeological congresses. The reader gets no sense of how local residents influenced, were influenced by, or responded to the legislation resulting from official perspectives. Nor does Abu El-Haj discuss the question of audience: to whom were archaeologists' appeals for valuing history being made? Via what communicative media? Were there any public responses? If, as she claims, science can be and is used to support particular political arguments and agendas, then it is also capable of supporting counterarguments, something Reid suggests throughout his history of Egyptian archaeology.

If Abu El-Haj is concerned with explaining how archaeology "emerged as particularly powerful and pervasive" (p. 6) and her interpretation insists that archaeology's power relies on producing "facts that can be seen" or "embodied" (p. 15 and *passim*), then she needs to relate the point of view of the audiences *perceiving* those "facts on the ground." My primary objection to the work as a whole is that there is no ethnographic representation of either the Israeli-Jewish or the Palestinian publics whose lives are affected by the subject matter of the book. At the heart of the issues that make Abu El-Haj's contribution so potentially valuable are the question of the production of modern Israel, and more broadly, the underlying question of how paradigms of history *born of* ideological positions both guide and become instantiated through scientific studies that support both the paradigms and the ideology, yet how the scientific nature of those studies renders the underlying politics opaque. A more straightforward account of how individuals living within the territory being claimed through Israeli nationalist-archaeological practice respond to, adopt, or contest the production of history would make her claims far more compelling. Although it is possible that Abu El-Haj's political, religious, or academic position prevented her from collecting such data, or from presenting it without endangering her interlocutors, her failure to clarify her own position within the ethnographic context renders her representations of archaeology even more unclear.

Both books are of interest to those studying the political history of the region. Reid's book is an excellent reference text for those concerned with various aspects of the production of history in Egypt, whether today or in the past, but it is too specialized for the casual reader. Abu El-Haj provides an important and timely look at some of the politics of self-representation behind the Israeli government's public face, within a broader argument about science's capacity for political involvement and for maintaining and even advancing colonialist policies. However, I reiterate that her failure to present either official Palestinian or public Palestinian/Israeli opinions and attitudes within the context of Israel's (settler) nationalist-archaeological discipline means that answers to the excellent questions she raises are never made clear.

Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, and Social Change in Nepal. *Laura M. Ahearn.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001. vii + 295 pp., photographs, tables, notes, references, index.

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Why should anyone be interested in love letters written by young people in an out-of-the-way village in the hills of Nepal? In her unique ethnography of literacy practices in the small Magar community in west-central Nepal she calls "Junigau," Laura Ahearn makes it clear that these seemingly trivial romantic missives in fact offer insights into fundamental changes not only in courtship and marriage practices but also understandings of self and agency. As the result of Nepali state and internationally sponsored development initiatives most men in the village are literate, but only recently has the same been true of women. Ahearn shows how female literacy rates have leaped from only about five percent for women born before 1951, to 91 percent for those born after 1963 (p. 192). Paralleling